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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0187
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0125
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C O N F I D E N T I A L DUSHANBE 000851

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

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SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN - KHOROG DEMONSTRATIONS SHOW MORE OF VULNERABILITY OF PRESIDENT RAHMON'S GOVERNMENT

REF: (A) DUSHANBE 216(B) DUSHANBE 720 (C) DUSHANBE 654

Classified By: AMBASSADOR TRACEY A. JACOBSON, 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: From June 18-20, residents of Khorog, in Tajikistan's Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Province, protested government security actions in the region. While the government was able to diffuse the situation, the incident shows yet again that the country's worsening economic conditions are affecting the government's ability to perform basic functions. End Summary.

¶2. (U) According to press reports, on June 18, approximately 300 residents of Khorog gathered in front of the government building to protest news that the government had sent additional troops to the region. After negotiations with the leaders of the group, which included Alim Sherzamov, the local representative of the Social Democratic Party, protesters dispersed.

¶3. (U) The group formed again on June 20, amidst rumors of continued troop movements to Khorog. These rumors were stirred by a group of former United Tajik Opposition "field commanders" who are allegedly involved in drug trafficking. The group of field commanders sent a letter to President Rahmon asking him to intervene to "prevent possible bloodshed in the region." The Dushanbe media reported that the field commanders negotiated with Ministry of Interior representatives; the field commanders agreed to hand over their weapons, and the Ministry agreed that no charges would be filed. The media further reported that by June 22, the situation had stabilized.

We Know There Are Known Unknowns

¶4. (U) It has been difficult to confirm information reported in the press about the demonstrations, at least in part because Khorog is remote. Reports have identified numerous concerns of the protesters: the sending of federal troops for maintaining public order in violation of Badakhshan's autonomy; general discontent brought about by rising food prices, and complaints about the work of the regional prosecutor. The government, in turn, has given numerous reasons for sending in personnel from Dushanbe: the need to combat drug traffickers in the region; preparations for a visit by President Rahmon in the near future, or scheduled military training.

¶5. (SBU) Local analysts have attempted to draw parallels between the Khorog demonstrations and government shootouts in

February in Gharm (reftel A) and in May in Kulyab (reftel B).

The personalities involved in each of the three incidents fought on different sides during the civil war (the Khorog and Gharm personalities were in factions of the United Tajik Opposition; the Kulyab personalities fought for the Patriotic Front). However, in each of these situations, government attempts to arrest individuals allegedly involved in drug trafficking were hindered or prevented by their connections to) or influence within - powerful regional clans, and Dushanbe officials had to negotiate to ensure that the events did not spiral out of control.

And We Know There Are Known Knowns

¶6. (C) Post reported in reftel C that residents of Khorog are discontented and highly critical of President Rahmon's government. Local Social Democratic Party members have also tried to convert this content into support for their party.

¶7. (C) There is no indication that large numbers of troops were sent to Khorog from Dushanbe. However, the Defense Ministry confirmed that mobile troops had landed near Khorog prior to June 18 for high mountain terrain training. The Governor of Badakhshan, Qodir Qosim, said that the Prosecutor General's office had sent representatives to Khorog to inspect the work of the regional prosecutor at some point prior to June 20. The Defense Minister, SherAli Khairulloev, told local media sources that drug trafficking in Badakhshan is forcing the government to take strong measures to "stabilize the situation." An OMON detachment of about a dozen men was sent to Khorog on June 16; the official

explanation was to do advance security for a presidential visit.

¶8. (C) While EmbOffs have been unable to visit Khorog to try to investigate the situation, the RSO traveled to Gharm to assess security in the Rasht Valley following the February killing there of Tajikistan's OMON Chief (reftel A). He found that Mirzokhuja Ahmadov, whom Ministry of Interior troops had attempted to arrest in February and who was responsible for the OMON Chief's killing, was still serving as the Head of the Ministry of Interior's Organized Crime Unit. Ahmadov) whose supporters shot and killed the Head of the Ministry of Interior's elite police squad in February - was protected by heavily armed men, and he could count on the support of several hundred people throughout the region. He had loyalists placed at key points on the road from Dushanbe to Gharm to warn of and, presumably, stop any movement of security forces from Dushanbe (septel).

And There Are Some Unknown Unknowns

¶9. (C) Comment: There is nothing new about the central government having difficulty projecting its authority outside Dushanbe. Clans in the outlying areas have always been able to resist the influence of the central government. There also does not appear to be an immediate threat to President Rahmon's government: each of the regions is remote; the clans are not united by a shared set of principles or goals; the major population centers) Dushanbe and Khujand) are well under control. However, the incidents serve to underscore the perception that the influence of President Rahmon's government does not extend far beyond Dushanbe and a few other population centers. President Rahmon may have effectively consolidated his power in Dushanbe since his 2006 reelection, but recent events show the weakness of central government authority in the provinces, and Rahmon's inability to be an effective intermediary between regional clans. End comment.

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